

Causes and Effects of Violence Against Women: The Bangladesh Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is a small South Asian country which borders India, Myanmar, and the Bay of Bengal. Since it gained independence in 1971, Bangladesh's economy has been growing about 6% annually. However, while the economy in Bangladesh is becoming more progressive, socially, Bangladesh still has room for advancement. Patriarchal customs mean that many women in Bangladesh face threats of violence.

Some main acts of violence committed against women include dowry killings, rape, sexual harassment and stalking, acid attacks, physical and mental abuse and sex trafficking. Nearly two out of every three women in Bangladesh are victims of some form of violence. Many women in Bangladesh fail to report violence committed against them as there persists a stigma surrounding rape, abuse, and domestic violence in the country.

Fortunately, laws and programs are being implemented to help reduce the amount of gender based violence that is taking place in Bangladesh. There are also specific laws which have been instituted by the Government of Bangladesh in an effort to prevent violence against women. Some of these laws include the Domestic Violence Act, 2010; and the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act, 2000.

Though legislation is an important step towards minimizing violence against women in Bangladesh, for significant change to occur, societal attitudes must change in order to end the stigma and victim-blaming that women face when they report violence carried out against them.

Keywords: Violence, violation, rights, women, discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women (VAW) and materialization of a historic unequal power relation between discrimination and mistreatment against women which results in physical, psychological and socioeconomic costs to both women and the society. Termed as a global epidemic, VAW is as much fatal as any serious diseases or accidents that causes deaths of women of reproductive ages (World Bank. 1993); and is one of the most disgraceful expressions of human rights violation across the world. WHO's multi-country study (10 countries including Bangladesh) demonstrates that most of the women in the study areas experience physical and sexual spousal violence in their lifetime, ranged from 15 percent to 71 percent (WHO, 2005). In Bangladesh, VAW is a very common practice which denies women's equal opportunity, security, self-esteem, and dignity in the family and in the society as a whole.

Being in a patriarchal society, powerlessness and vulnerability is associated with women's lives where they are dominated and subjugated by men. In Bangladesh, women face various forms of violence, ranging from wife abuse to rape, dowry killings acid throwing, sexual harassment, and sexual slavery through trafficking of women (Zaman, 1999), among which domestic violence is widely prevalent both in urban and rural areas as an everyday matter of women's lives. Deeply rooted subordinate positions of women allow men to dominate and control not only their families and resources (Schuler et al., 1998 stated in Hossain, 2007) but also their

lives as well. Consequently, societal norms and traditional values associated with gender roles and supremacy within households and society tend to trigger, dictate and provoke domestic violence against women in Bangladesh (Koenig et al., 2003).

UN Secretary-General (Annan, 1999) in a video conference on violence against women stated that this violence knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth and as long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace in the world. Thus, it is highly appreciable to adopt effective strategies for the prevention of violence which involve public awareness campaigns and community-based networks to combat violence and support victims. However, the Government of Bangladesh has recently passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 for the protection of women and children from family violence and discrimination. However, we observe that in spite of having many legal protections for women in the society, this form of violence is still continuing and in some cases are increasing day-by-day as evidenced by the recent magnitude of eve teasing and acid abuse. In this context, my aim in this article is to disclose the socio-economic factors and the effects of the domestic violence occurring in Bangladesh and to look for national and international legal protection for the victims; and finally, some interventions are recommended to be taken in compliance with national and international legal instruments.

METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary data were collected for this study. Primary data were collected through interviews and questionnaires, focus group interviews, Observation, Diaries, Critical incidents, Portfolios etc. Primary data is effective to increase the authenticity and reliability of the research results as it helps to obtain real world information. On the other hand, secondary data were collected from sources other than primary respondents.

The main resources of secondary data were, Naripokkho (NP), Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP), Women for Women (WFW), Ain-O-Salish Kendra (ASK), Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Women Affairs (DWA), Inspector General of Police (IGP) Office, Deputy Inspector General (DIG, Crime), Dhaka Medical College and Hospital, Sir Salimullah Medical College and Hospital, Community Development Library (CDL), ODHAKAR (A Coalition for Human Rights), and Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR).

Definition of Violence Against Women:

The 1993 United Nations Declaration on the elimination of violence against women provides a very broad and inclusive framework for studying violence against women. According to this definition, "Violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion on or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, *er*al Ass Article 1) Specifically, the Declaration outlines a broad variety of facts and circumstances that are included in this definition:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation occurring at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, and trafficking of women and forced prostitution;
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

Various Forms of Violence Against Women' in Bangladesh:

Increased research, reporting and activism in the area of violence against women have created an awareness of the problem both nationally and globally. Nonetheless, disaggregated data for violence is largely unavailable, except in cases of acid assaults, murders/suicides and custodial violence.

Domestic Violence:

Domestic violence or violence perpetrated in home or family environment is a major social problem in Bangladesh. Domestic common and widespread country. Women of all economic strata are vulnerable to maltreatment and abuse by their husbands, in-laws, and other family members. Family violence is more frequent in rural areas than in urban areas and similarly it is more a phenomenon in poor households (Schuler et al 2000). Being part of a patriarchal society, Bangladeshi women are taught to be submissive, tolerant, and self-sacrificing from an early age. Furthermore, the social belief that a woman's place is in her husband's home is also deeply rooted in women's self-view and self-worth. These social values make it extremely difficult for women to assert themselves and speak out against domestic violence. In cases of marital and family conflict, society generally places the blame on the wife and holds her exclusively responsible for failing to build a strong foundation in the family. Consequently, women are reluctant to complain of domestic violence or file cases against their husbands out of fear of unrelenting social stigmatization. The social factors are level of economic inequality between men and women, level of female autonomy, attitudes towards gender roles and violence against women, the extent of extended family, neighbors' and friends' intervention in domestic violence incidents and some measure of social capital (Ahmed, 2005; Koenig et al., 2003; Morrison et al., 2007; Naved and Persson, 2005).

Dowry-Related Violence:

The practice of dowry demand (Joutuk) is not deeply rooted in Bengali Muslim tradition, but has emerged as a major social evil in the recent years. Generally dowry means the property that the bride's family give to the groom or his family upon marriage. Prospective grooms and their families demand large sums of money or property would-be bride's family as a precondition to the marriage from the agreement. Although dowry demand is illegal, the practice persists in the rural communities. In fact, very few marriages in without any dowry most cases the total amount of dowry is not paid at the time of marriage. Rather the bride's family pays part of the dowry before the marriage and promises remainder soon after the marriage. When the bride's family fails to meet the deadline. her husband and the in-laws the verbally and physically abuse her to compel her family to to pay pay. In many cases the abuse becomes severe in nature, for example, woman has acid thrown on her face, is burnt, severely beaten, and in some cases even murdered.

Acid Violence:

Acid violence is a crime that has been frequently seen in Bangladesh. Throwing acid to women became a common means of taking revenge by the rejected suitors in the 1980s, but it has reached the highest peak in recent years. Bangladesh has the highest worldwide incidence of acid violence and, acid burns constitute a major percent of the total burn injuries in Bangladesh. Acid violence involves throwing acid to a person to disfigure and scar him for life.

Victimization By Fatwa:

According to Islamic teaching, fatwa is a religious edict based on Islamic principles pronounced by a religious scholar. In Bangladesh, however, this notion has been totally misconceived and is used by the merely educated village mullahs (clerics) who are not necessarily scholars in Islam. Through some informal village justice system (shalish), these Mullahs punish women for so-called anti-social or immoral activities. In almost all the cases women are brought before the shalish simply for their involvement in extra marital affairs, marrying a man from different religion, giving birth to a child before marriage, complications due to oral divorce pronounced to a woman by her husband and so on. Although these punishments are generally are not legal per se, but carried out against the helpless women because the Mullahs exert and power in the rural considerable autonomy areas. People's lack of knowledge about the law and religion, poor education and absence of social awareness are the key factors, which allow 'Fatwa' to be issued. Various types of punishment is given by a 'Fatwa' including awarding 'Hilla' (intervening (intervening marriage) to another man, punishing with lashes, social physical violence. cial boycott, stoning, divorce, and physical violence.

Trafficking of Women:

Trafficking of women and children is a significant problem in the developing countries around the globe, and particularly in South Asia. As trafficking and sexual exploitation is a crosscutting issue in this subcontinent, it has become a growing concern, especially across borders. The problem is more acute in a country like Bangladesh that shares borders with India. Bangladeshi women and children are trafficked both within the country and internationally. The never-ending demand for women and children make trafficking a highly profitable business. The organized gangs of traffickers often lure young women with false promises of better jobs or false proposals of love and marriage.

Victims of trafficking are generally trafficked for forced prostitution, but sometimes also for other purposes such as organ transplantation and slave labor. There is no accurate statistical data about the number of women, young girls and boys being trafficked from Bangladesh to serve the sex trade in neighboring countries. The trafficked victims end up in brothels where they are sold for sexual exploitation or serve as street sex workers in India, Pakistan and the Middle East. Although the government has enacted stringent laws and implemented various policies to combat this menace, trafficking continues to be a significant problem in Bangladesh.

Rape and Sexual Violence:

Rape is a common form of violence even among police. Although most institutional records show that younger women are more susceptible to rape, a detailed look at institutional case records reveal that the age of women is not recorded in most court dockets.

Eve-teasing:

Eve-teasing is a serious concern today in the discussion of violence against women in Bangladesh. This emerging phenomenon, nowadays, is dealt with seriously by different types of professionals, especially social activists and academics. The term 'Eve teasing' is an activity where the girls are teased by the boys. More specifically, it means when a boy or a group of boys try to disturb a girl or girls by yelling, showing sexual gesture and instruments, obstructing, offering bad proposal etc., whether she is on the street, in a vehicle or in any other place. It causes vulnerability and insecurity for the girls.

Custodial Violence:

Though sex disaggregated data is not available but out of the total 90,000 cases in the last 25 years, women were targets of 5867 cases which also included rape. Apart from these, during 1996-97, 85 persons including Seema Chowdhury died in police custody among which 41 died in 1997 and the remaining 37 died in 1998. It is worth mentioning here that among the 37 who died in 1998, 3 were convicted and the rest 34 died due to police torture, i.e., their accusation was not proved or they were innocent. In most cases perpetrators are either unknown persons or miscreants.

Reasons of Violence against Women:

Violence against women is a cause and a consequence of inequality and discrimination, whether in law and/or practice, (though our existing laws are good, yet these cannot be implemented properly due to weak administrative systems and lack of proper information) and it is a source of deep concern globally, especially as it substantively impacts the effective exercise of citizenship rights by women. Every country in the world has responsibility to take effective measures to prevent ultimately one of the top government priorities to eliminate violence against women.

Violence against women and girls in Bangladesh is widespread and politically influenced; and hence administrative failure and lack of social resistance and implementation of laws are the main reasons that lead to the perpetrators going free. Lots of NGOs and International research organizations closely monitor the overall situation of women and girls in Bangladesh and document the issues relating to violence against

women, in particular, dowry violence, rape, acid violence and stalking (sexual harassment). Victims of rape face severe social stigma where in majority cases victims are treated as the guilty party by the police. As a result a majority of victims/their families do not seek justice and try to hide the incident. All of these contribute to the exploitation. Deprivation and oppression of women in Bangladesh, and are violations of the fundamental Human Rights (Farouk, SA, 2005).

The main reasons are given below:

- Lack of gender equality
- Lack of awareness and knowledge about rights
- Poverty
- Low educational level
- Women's lower position
- Socio-cultural restrictions
- Tendency to coercively control women
- Polygamy
- Misinterpretation of Religion
- Misapplication of Religious belief

Prevention and Response:

Bangladesh, often cited as a model of progress in achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), appears to be sliding backwards when it comes to dealing with violence against women (VAW). Police statistics and assessments by non-government organizations (NGOs) working to establish women's rights show that there is an increasing trend in violence against women and girls in Bangladesh. According to police records, while there were 2,981 cases of dowry-related violence in 2004, the figure has already hit 4,563 in the first nine months of 2012. Also, where there were 2,901 rape cases recorded in 2004, the figure for the current year, up to August, stands at 2,868 (www.ipsnews.net/2012/10/violence-against-women-persists-in-bangladesh/).

More resources are needed to strengthen the prevention of intimate partner and sexual violence, including primary prevention, i.e. stopping it from happening in the first place. But the important factor is that few NGO's and very weak women activists cannot monitor and properly control the overall situation. Women are always the victims of anything that happens whether in home or outside, and it has become a big social disease in Bangladesh.

An appropriate response from the various governmental sectors and NGO's can play an important role in the prevention of violence against women and girls in Bangladesh. Along with other service providers, sensitization and education of diversification in culture and laws within the country are important in this regard. To fully address the consequences of violence and the needs of victims/survivors, it requires a multi organizational response. Only a combined workforce can reduce the bad effects of violence against women and girls in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is rising and now it is called digital Bangladesh. Connectivity is very important to reduce any sort of violence in the society. Bangladesh needs better co-ordination to reduce any sort of risk in the society.

The main focus to reduce violence against women and girls in Bangladesh should be on:

- Law and order force should ensure quick response both during and after incident.
- Cultural reforms (negative things which discriminate women).
- Environmental reforms (Ensuring a secure, free and fair environment for women).
- Establish new victim support centre according to the density of population.
- Justice system reform (Set law and quick justice system, once offenders' offences are established).
- Mindset change (Women and girls are not weak or neglected person).

- Ensuring Human Rights Act in Bangladesh (It works in all section as it is the right of every citizen).
- Field based Research and Evaluation process and take action for practical solution.
- Mass awareness building related to violence against women and girls' law.
- World violence against women and children day should be observed in each upazilla.

Measures Taken by the Govt. of Bangladesh:

- Major Laws relating to VAW
- The Domestic Violence Act, 2010
- The Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act, 2000 (Amended in 2003).
- The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929
- Death and Birth Registration Act 2004
- Death and Birth Registration Act 2004
- The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, 1933
- The Dowry Provision Act, 1980 The Acid Control Act, 2002
- The Acid Crimes Control Act, 2002
- The Speedy Trial Tribunal 2002

There are also some co-operation with Development Partners and NGOs. Ministry of Women and Child affairs has been implementing a project named Multi-Sectoral Projects on Violence Against Women funded by NORAD including setting up of One-Stop-Crises Centre (OSCC) in the Six Divisional level Medical College and Hospitals. This project deals with both Acid victims and Rape victims to facilitate them with quick investigation and required medical and legal services. The other project being implemented aims to end gender based violence with the financial assistance of UNFPA. The prime objective of this project is to mobilize communities to end gender-based violence and to bring attitudinal changes of male members and the in-laws towards gender based violence.

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh has taken a serious concern to take anti-dowry steps and combat all types of VAW in the spirit of social movement. Every year Ministry of Home Affairs prepares the Counter Trafficking Framework Report: Bangladesh perspective. Administrative circular has been issued regarding evidence procedure to ensure easy access to survivors of violence against women to medical services. The agencies for effective implementation of laws like Magistrate, Judges, Police and Public Prosecutors are being provided with due training and orientation in this regard. Media is being used to sensitize people about the Laws.

CONCLUSION

The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights to men and women, albeit only in the spheres of the State and of public life, and not in the private sphere. This is a source of concern, as inequality and discrimination are pervasive in the private sphere and thus constitutional protection to rights of equality and non-discrimination should therefore be extended to all spheres. Some efforts have been made towards the empowerment of women and to increase women's political participation, including reserving seats and quotas. Bangladesh also serves as a good example as regards to its deployment of women officers in peacekeeping missions around the world. There are lots of skilled and experienced women and girls in Bangladesh but due to the lack of opportunity and proper platform, they cannot utilize their skill and experience. Government and private sectors will need to find out these highly skilled and experienced females to utilize their talent. They should also reform this sector with zero tolerance.

Everybody will agree that women and girls in Bangladesh need to raise their own voice to overcome any unwanted or worse situation in their lives. In most cases they are the victims of any discrimination within the society. It is very important for them to discrimination within the society. It is very important for them to act immediately to solve the issues. Bangladesh is also a signatory to international conventions designed to protect women and their rights. Yet, very little is being done in the field level to ensure a secure and safe environment

for them. So, every woman and girl should take the advantage of this facility and raise the issues in the proper platform to resolve any discrimination against them.

Existing laws regarding protection of women's rights should be enforced effectively. Law enforcing agencies need to handle the situation with sincerity, honesty and strong commitment without any hesitation and bias. Awareness and capacity building among women are also important. Under the existing social norms and values, males' attitude and behavior towards females need to be changed as well. In this regard relevant agencies of the Government, NGOs, researchers, lawyers, activists and media need to come forward and work together for the advocacy and campaign against violence against women and girls in Bangladesh.

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